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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: GUIDANCE: UN DEMOCRACY FUND ADVISORY BOARD
MEETING

REF: A. NORIN-OSTERMEIER EMAIL WEDNESDAY MARCH 19 2008

5:04 PM

- [1](#)B. STATE 030490
- [1](#)C. OSTERMEIER-NORIN EMAIL WEDNESDAY MARCH 26 2008
- [1](#)D. JOVIN-NORIN EMAIL THURSDAY MARCH 6 2008 4:15 PM

[1](#)1. (U) This is an action request with guidance for USUN to participate in the March 28 UN Democracy Fund (UNDEF) Advisory Board meeting. Please see para 4 for action requested.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Per reftel A, the March 28 Advisory Board meeting will include a discussion of: a) the second funding round process generally, b) the suggested 86 programs UNDEF proposes to fund ("the short list"), c) the appointment of a new UNDEF Advisory Board Chair, and d) the inclusion (or not) of the Community of Democracies (CD) and the International Conference on New and Restored Democracies (ICNRD) in the "Friends of UNDEF" group.

[1](#)3. (SBU) The Department continues to have high expectations for the UN Democracy Fund under Roland Rich's leadership. While the Department is very pleased with UNDEF's efforts to increase the percentage of grants allocated to civil society, it is disappointed that at least one conference (in Benin) has made UNDEF's short list, and that the Advisory Board was given a narrow window to give advice on and comment on the short list. The Department urges that UNDEF reconsider its strategy of funding no more than one program per country as this will make it more difficult for the Fund to assist those countries that are most in need. Per reftel B, the Department wishes for UNDEF to defer the decision on a new Advisory Board Chair until Advisory Board members have had adequate time to consult with one another.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Action Request: Given previous reporting (ref A), Department expects the meeting to be a debate and discussion about the appropriate role of the Advisory Board in UNDEF's work and to focus on this year's funding round and the decision of the Advisory Board Chair. USUN is requested to convey U.S. perspective, as appropriate, during the various portions of the meeting as noted in paragraphs 5 through 8. Should the discussion focus on particular programs, previous guidance on U.S. key priorities for funding stands (particularly with respect to the BBC program in Burma about which India appears to have concerns and the desirability of the funding the ActionAid program in Burma). As feasible, Mission is requested to consult informally with other Board Members to seek their agreement before these issues come up for discussion.

15. (SBU) The Second Funding Round Process

-- UNDEF's Advisory Board should help set the Fund's strategic direction and generally approve the methods by which programs are selected for funding. The Board should also monitor the Fund's work and ensure that it is meeting its stated goals. The Advisory Board should not be involved in the day-to-day management of the Fund, nor should it expect to review every application that comes to UNDEF for funding (Note: there were approximately 1800 grant applications in this second round. End Note). However, the Board should have the opportunity to comment on the projects proposed, and should not be expected simply to rubber-stamp decisions taken by UNDEF staff or by the Secretary General.

-- The Department generally believes that UNDEF's hiring of democracy "experts" to make an initial review of all 1800 projects is a sound tactic but it is generally concerned that Advisory Board members were not informed of the identities of those experts, and that the full criteria used during this process were not made available in final to the Advisory Board until March 19. The Department would appreciate clarification on whether or not UNDEF plans to make the full criteria for evaluation public. (Note: The criteria provided on March 19 had a date stamp of October 20th, 2007, well before the ending of the call for proposals, yet the Department has not been able to find this information online. End Note.)

16. (SBU) UNDEF's "Short List"

-- The Department is generally very pleased at the clear emphasis UNDEF is giving to the work of civil society organizations. The Department is pleased at UNDEF's reassurance that fully 100% of its suggested programs are to be implemented by civil society and that in the 23 instances where UN agencies are involved in the programs, it is only to move funds to local non-governmental organizations. The Department would appreciate clarification on whether or not UN agencies will also provide a measure of oversight to local NGOs. (Note: We recognize the need to use existing infrastructure to assist in getting funding to NGOs as quickly as possible, but want to be cautious that the additional relationship with a UN agency does not create additional obligations for the implementing NGO and/or the appearance or substance of a supervisory role for the UN agency over the NGO or the project. End Note.) UNDEF should be commended on this substantial increase in the percentage of grantees that are civil society organizations.

-- The Department is very pleased that strong programs in key priority countries were approved (Russia, Venezuela, Burma, Nicaragua and Pakistan). However, the Department is disappointed to see that the sole purpose of one project - in Benin - is to hold a conference. The U.S. continues to maintain that UNDEF's purpose is not to hold yet more conferences. The Department would prefer that this program be removed from the short list and regrets that the vigorous and sustained U.S. efforts toward this end have thus far been unsuccessful. We do note the reduction in the amount of support for this from \$1,000,000 to \$350,000. Mission should use its best judgment about whether continued efforts to block or further reduce funding for the Benin conference would have any likelihood of success and whether such efforts would be counterproductive to the other objectives set forth in this message.

-- The Department is disappointed that the Fund's short list does not include programs that support the initiatives of the Community of Democracies (CD) or initiatives in support of the Inter-American Democratic Charter (IADC); both are USG priorities and align with UNDEF's goals. We are aware that several NGOs submitted programs related to the CD and the IADC for consideration but apparently were eliminated during the experts' review of the programs. The Department would appreciate a broader consultation on the criteria used during the experts' review so that we can better understand how strong proposals on important topics such as the Community of

Democracies can succeed in the future.

-- As noted in reftel C, Department can support India's proposal to delay a final decision on UNDEF's "short list" providing India agrees to support at least one (and preferably both) of the two Burma projects currently under consideration (the proposals are from the BBC World Trust and Action Aid); to be helpful to our position on the Advisory Board Chair; and not to use the delay to advocate for any patently unacceptable programs (such as further conferences or reinstatement of proposals that the U.S. strongly opposed).

17. (SBU) Advisory Board Chair

-- Per reftel B, Department requests that the decision on Advisory Board chair be postponed until after the Advisory Board has had an adequate chance to review all candidates.

18. (SBU) CD and ICNRD in "Friends of UNDEF"

-- Department believes that the "Friends of UNDEF" group should be limited to past Advisory Board members and to donors whose contributions do not meet the threshold required for Advisory Board membership. It is important for UNDEF to cultivate a relationship with all donors, not only those on the Advisory Board. By establishing a consultative group for this group alone - with the purpose of providing information about UNDEF's work - contributions to UNDEF at any level will be seen to have privileges not accorded to all member states.

-- Department encourages UNDEF to consult with the Community of Democracies on an ad hoc basis. (Note: Department strongly opposes the idea of ICNRD joining any advisory group for UNDEF. It is an organization with no membership criteria, and the Chair of ICNRD in the future could easily be Cuba or Iran or any other country. It does not represent any sort of commitment by its members to the mandate or ideals that underpin the UNDEF and would not have anything positive to add to the functioning of UNDEF or its Advisory Board. End Note.)

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